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Between Governments and Researchers: OECD Information, a Two-Way Flow

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Abstract

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) both gathers and disseminates information. The presentation will demonstrate some of the information that the OECD makes available to researchers all over the world, concentrating on material published via the Internet. In addition, there will be a discussion of work that the OECD Central Library is doing to gather information to aid researchers working in the organisation. These include the provision of information files on certain "horizontal projects" which entail the Library providing periodical articles, electronic documents and links to relevant Internet sites. Some of these latter will also be of interest to researchers working on similar topics.

Paper

1. Introduction

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) is located in Paris and has 29 member countries. The predecessor to the OECD, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), was founded in 1948 in order to oversee the Marshall Plan of United States aid to

Europe after the Second World War. In 1961 the European countries together with the United States and Canada faced a new challenge: to make their rebuilt economies thrive in a world where international interdependence was increasingly becoming the norm. Thus it was that the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation became the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In the convention signed in 1961, the OECD is charged with promoting policies to:

- achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus contribute to the development of the world economy;
- contribute to sound economic expansion in Member as well as non-Member countries in the process of economic development; and
- contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations.

These aims are still valid today and the OECD's mission remains to promote economic growth and development in Member and non-Member countries, and to contribute to an open international trade and investment system. These aims are achieved through co-operative effort on the part of the Member countries. The purpose of this paper is to describe the OECD both as information provider and as information consumer. The organisation provides information to researchers through its archives, statistics and publications. It uses information from many sources including that provided by the Central Library and the Library Intranet pages.

PART A - The OECD as an information provider

A.1. The OECD archives

The OEEC archives of documents from 1948 to 1960 and OECD archives from 1961 onwards are deposited at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. These documents are declassified and sent to Florence approximately 30 years after their creation and are transferred annually from Paris to Florence. The most significant items are chronological collections of coded documents such as minutes of meetings or working papers. Material is available for consultation by researchers who apply in writing to the EUI. More information on the archives can be found at the OECD Archives Home Page (1) and a search engine for archives held at the EUI is available (2). A list of OECD bodies and committees is available to aid research.

A.2 Statistics

A.2.1 Free statistics

The OECD has loaded onto the Internet statistics in various domains which are freely available for consulting and downloading. From the lead page (3) one has access to the tables in "OECD in Figures" in either HTML or Portable Document Format (PDF) format. There are some useful tables contained under the rubric "Frequently requested statistics". To quickly find the GDP of one of the OECD member countries a couple of clicks from "Frequently requested statistics" brings up the relevant table (4). Similarly, it is possible to compare unemployment rates across 21 of the OECD member countries with the monthly table "Standardised Unemployment Rates" (5).

Energy statistics provided by the International Energy Agency are available in graphic form. Of particular interest are the "Energy Indicators" which show figures for energy production, imports, CO2 emissions, electricity consumption and population. (6)

A.2.2 Priced statistical publications

The OECD publishes a range of statistics with the data available either in printed or in electronic format and information about these publications can be found at the OECD Bookshop Web Site (7). The Quarterly National Accounts and The Main Economic Indicators, for instance, are published in printed format and on diskette or magnetic tape. The OECD Hot File (8) is a database which is updated weekly and provides the latest official data on industrial production, OECD leading indicators, unemployment, price indices, business surveys, retail sales, foreign trade, balance of payments and financial indicators. It contains tables for OECD Member countries and comparative tables on consumer prices, industrial production and unemployment. The file is available on annual subscription. However, government agencies of OECD member countries can register for free access. One publication for which there is no printed equivalent is the *OECD Statistical Compendium on CD-ROM* which gives a macroeconomic overview of the economies of all OECD member countries with historical data.

A3. OECD Publications

A.3.1 Free Publications

A number of free publications are available for downloading from the OECD Internet site. The lead page Free Online Documents (9) links to several downloadable publications including The OECD Observer (10). The page (11) lists available documents by activity sector and by clicking on one of the subjects e.g. Information & Communications Policy which is listed under Science, Technology, Industry, the searcher is taken down the hierarchy (12) and then to Information Economy (13) where the documents themselves are listed.

The majority of these documents are working papers and general distribution papers. These latter, as the name implies, are freely available to any researcher who finds them of interest. The general distribution documents have a code e.g. OCDE/GD(97)123 where the figure in brackets identifies the year of publication. These publications are generally available in Portable Document Format (PDF) format.

As well as these publications mentioned above, there are regular updates of information put onto the OECD Internet. The page Financial Market Trends Highlights (14) presents a résumé of recent developments in international and national financial markets. These short articles are supplemented with tables in PDF format.

A.3.2 Priced Publications

The OECD bookshop site (15) offers the opportunity to browse or to search for priced publications. The OECD publishes over 250 monographs and as many periodical titles each year and all in-print titles are in the bookstore database. Currently there are more than 2500 books in print, the majority available in English and French. As well as offering these publications for purchase, the OECD designates a Depository Library in each OECD

Member country - usually the National Library - where members of the public can consult the broad range of OECD publications and working papers. All publications are supplied to depository libraries free of charge. These libraries are listed on the bookshop Internet pages (16) under the rubrique "about OECD publications" Some of the publications such as the *OECD Observer* and the yearly economic surveys of member countries can be found in most academic libraries and in public libraries which have a strong social sciences collection.

PART B - The OECD as an information consumer

B.1 Gathering the information

The OECD's areas of activities cover a wide range. Although the layman may think that our name implies that we are mainly interested in economic development - and this is certainly a main interest for the Organisation - the areas of interest include macroeconomics, agriculture, development, science technology & industry, energy, environment, education and fiscal affairs. In fact, a glance at the Internet page OECD activities (17) gives some idea of the wide range of the OECD's interests. A lot of the information is provided by member countries' governments directly to the OECD but there is a lot which is gathered by other means, and this is where the Central Library plays a major role.

B2. OECD Central Library

The Library has a physical collection of some 50,000 monographs and to 2,600 periodical subscriptions. A large proportion of these latter circulate around the Organisation. Unfortunately, some of the circulation lists are fairly long, which means that the unfortunates at the end of the list can wait some time before receiving that particular issue of the periodical. To overcome this, we have created profiles in Uncover and use this service and that of the British Library's Inside to quickly obtain copies of articles from periodicals for which we have no subscription or which are circulating around the Organisation when an article is urgently needed.

The Uncover profiles also allow our clients to receive Tables of Contents by e-mail. They then contact the Library if they wish to see the full-text of any of these articles. If we subscribe to the journal and we have a copy available, we will either lend the issue or provide a photocopy. If not, depending on the urgency of the request, we will obtain the article by inter-library-loan or order it from a document delivery service. As is the case with all libraries, we have to balance the speed of the service against cost.

B2.1 Information files and bibliographies

For a year now, the Central library has been gathering information to produce information files and bibliographies on specific subjects including Ageing Populations, Electronic Commerce, Corporate Governance, Trade & Investment Liberalisation and Employment & The OECD Jobs Strategy. These files, which exist in a physical form in our Reading Room and in an electronic form on the OECD Intranet, contain references to, and in some cases the full-text of, periodical articles, a list of relevant monographs held in the Library, latest news stories, a list of WWW sites of important research organisations that specialise in the subject, a list of other useful WWW sites and information on important conferences. Many of the WWW sites are of interest to researchers who are looking for statistics or other information in one of these subjects. One site of interest to demographers that we

discovered whilst gathering those concerned with ageing populations is the US Census Bureau's International Data Population Pyramids. (18) When a country is selected, it is possible to see population predictions by age spread and by sex to the year 2050.

The full-text of periodical articles is either downloaded from the Internet if it is available in PDF format or a link is established if it is in HTML format. The page of articles on digital money, which is part of the Library's file on electronic commerce, contains the full-text of a working paper from the Bank for International Settlements. The page of article references on government policy contains links to the two papers "Towards a European Framework for Digital Signatures & Encryption" and "A Framework for Global Electronic Commerce" as these two have been loaded onto the Internet in HTML format by the European Commission and the White House respectively.

As useful WWW sites are discovered they are added to the files. The WWW links page of the file "Corporate Governance" has as its first entry a link to the leading Internet site on the subject (19). As this subject is fairly hot at the moment, it is not surprising to find a fair number of principal sites dealing with corporate governance including the OECD's own site. (20)

B2.2 The Central Library's Virtual Reference Desk

There are several libraries, particularly in the US, which have created, or are in the process of creating, a virtual reference site. The OECD Central Library has created a virtual reference desk which has been loaded onto the Intranet. The site contains the information files mentioned above, as well as CD-ROMs on the network and annotated links to hundreds of useful WWW sites. As our clients at the OECD frequently use the Internet to supplement their research, these latter have proved to be popular. I am sure you have all heard the complaint "I would use the Internet more if I could find anything" and it is intended that these links provided by the Central Library will aid our client in going directly to a useful site.

The links to government or country-specific sites are listed alphabetically. One example of a country's or region's web page is the page "Hong Kong World Wide Web Database". (21) As well as this page created by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, there is an official HK government page produced by the Government Information Centre. (22) All these country specific servers generally link to information produced by the country's government, news sources and national academic institutions and research centres.

The page "Useful Pages Arranged by Subject", as its name implies, is a list of about 200 sites under broad subject areas. Click on Environment as an example and the first link displayed is Envirolink. (23) This site says that it is "the most comprehensive resource of environmental information available on the Internet". Other pages making up the Library Links list news sites, electronic journals, financial sites and banks' home pages.

The Library Catalogue will be mounted on the Intranet powered by a Z39.50 server. This will allow our clients, not only to search the Library collections, but other Z39.50 compliant library catalogues as well.

C. Conclusions

It is an obvious truism that the better the quality of the input information, the better the quality of the output. The OECD has a justified reputation for the accuracy and quality of its analyses and of its data. To keep to their high standards OECD economists and statisticians must have access to the latest accurate information on a topic or a geographical area. The Central Library is playing a major part in finding and providing quality information and data from both traditional sources and newer ones like the Internet. The economists and statisticians then take this information and provide the data and publications which the OECD makes available for policy makers, researchers and the private sector all over the world.

Footnotes

1. <http://www.oecd.org/about/archives.htm>
2. <http://wwwarc.iue .it/ehar/toehar.html>
3. <http://www.oecd.org/statlist.htm>
4. <http://www.oecd.org/std/qnagdp.htm>
5. http://www.oecd.org/news_and_events/new-numbers/sur/surlist.htm
6. http://www.iea.org/stats/files/keystats/STATS_97.HTM
7. <http://electrade.att.fr/cgi-bin/OECDBookShop.storefront/>
8. <http://www.oecd.org/std/hot/index.htm>
9. <http://www.oecd.org/freedoc.htm>
10. http://www.oecd.org/publications/observer/index_en.html
11. <http://www.oecd.org/freeactivities.htm>
12. <http://www.oecd.org/dsti/sti/it/prod/online.htm>
13. <http://www.oecd.org/dsti/sti/it/infosoc/prod/online.htm>
14. <http://www.oecd.org/daf/fin/nethigh.htm>
15. <http://electrade.att.fr/cgi-bin/OECDBookShop.storefront/>
16. <http://electrade.att.fr/cgi-bin/OECDBookShop.storefront/>
17. <http://www.oecd.org/activities.html>
18. <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idddyr.html>
19. <http://www.corpgov.net/>

20. <http://www.oecd.org/daf/fin/netcorp.htm>
 21. <http://www.cuhk.hk/hkwww.htm>
 22. <http://www.info.gov.hk/>
 23. <http://www.envirolink.org/>
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